

Address and Poem

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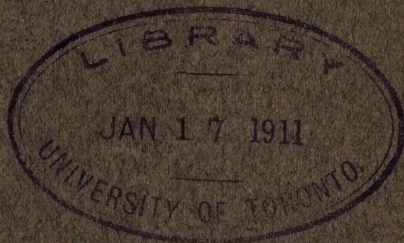
Bowdoin College

JUNE 26, 1907

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE
CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

OF THE CLASS OF 1825



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by H. H. Chapman

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ADDRESS

BY

PROFESSOR HENRY LELAND CHAPMAN, D.D.,

CLASS OF 1866

ADDRESS

TO speak of Longfellow in this place, and to this audience, is a privilege, — a privilege none the less though speech may not rise to the height of the subject and the occasion. The place is hallowed by the memory of his own presence and voice, when he was already crowned with the beauty of age, and with the honor of the world. The audience is composed, in part at least, of those whose feeling of reverence for the poet is made tender, and in some measure personal, by the strong and subtle tie which binds together the sons of a common *Alma Mater*. It is a brother-alumnus whose character and work we commemorate, now when a hundred years have passed since his life began, and twenty-five years since it ended.

It is true, of course, that, like all poets, he belongs to everyone that has found pleasure, or comfort, or inspiration in his verse; and his fame is one of the cherished treasures of the land. Yet it seems to be our privilege, as it certainly is our pride, to feel that, in some sense, he belongs peculiarly to us. He was a student, a graduate, and a professor of Bowdoin, and through all the years that followed his residence here, he cherished and expressed for the college a deep and filial regard. He was still an undergraduate when the “phantom of fame” rose upon his

vision, and he wrote to his father, — “I most eagerly aspire after eminence in literature. My whole soul burns most ardently for it; and every earthly thought centres in it.”

As he has, himself, recorded, it was in No. 27, Winthrop Hall, the eastern windows of which looked out upon the grove of fragrant and murmuring pines, that he wrote the poems which, appearing in the *United States Literary Gazette*, attracted not a little attention, and in many minds associated the initials, “H. W. L.,” with the most hopeful verse produced at that time, in New England.

It was here that he returned, after three rapturous and fruitful years in the Old World, to begin his work as a teacher amid the scenes which had witnessed his diligence as a student. On the fiftieth anniversary of his graduation, he did in this place what he could scarcely be persuaded to do elsewhere, — he read a poem to a public audience; in which, in his inimitably modest way, he laid a tribute, wrought equally of art and of affection, at the proud feet of his *Alma Mater*.

That was a memorable scene, as some who are present to-day will recall. The floor and galleries, the pews, the aisles, and every “coigne of vantage” in this historic church, were crowded with people who held their breaths to catch the spoken music of his salutation: —

“O ye familiar scenes, — ye groves of pine,
That once were mine, and are no longer mine, —
Thou river widening thro’ the meadows green

To the vast sea, so near and yet unseen, —
Ye halls, in whose seclusion and repose
Phantoms of fame, like exhalations, rose
And vanished, — we who are about to die
Salute you ! ”

Do you suppose the college will ever forget that salutation, or cease to claim the poet as her own? — Not her own in any jealous or exclusive sense, but in the proud and grateful sense in which a mother claims as her own the son whose achievements in the world of men reflect glory upon the household from which he went, and to which his feet sometimes, and his affections always, return.

It was a characteristic and beautiful trait of Longfellow that he cherished an abiding interest in the ancestral line which led him back to the cabin of the Mayflower, in the city of his birth and happy boyhood, and in the college where he passed the years of his youth and early manhood ; and he has written of them all in words that never lose their grace and beauty, more than does the familiar lapping of the wave upon the beach, or the ever-recurring flush of the sunset cloud.

Many who have never visited his boyhood home, or seen the “ shadowy lines of its trees,” the “ fort upon the hill,” and the “ breezy dome ” of Deering’s woods, yet hear in the exquisite melody of *My Lost Youth* — that song of early memories — the elemental chant of the human heart, singing to itself in quiet monotone of the scenes and associations which are not so much remembered, as wrought into the

continuous fabric of a life of which the conventional distinctions of yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow, are phases and not fragments. It is to the credit of the critics, who have not failed to speak in the wise terms of criticism, or in the flippant terms of disparagement, of much that Longfellow has written, — it is to their credit that they have passed by this lyric, captivated, or puzzled, perhaps by the charm which defies analysis, and compels admiration. Striking as it is in form, and simple in substance, no parodist has laid frivolous or profane hands upon it. Nature and art are so wedded in it that the twain have indeed become one; and it will go on singing to generation after generation a song that will touch the hearts of men and women everywhere, like

“The song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.”

This poem of boyhood memories was written when Mr. Longfellow was nearing his fiftieth year, after his retirement from the Cambridge professorship, and when his fame had long since passed beyond the region not only of his early home, but of his native land. For his fame could not linger, any more than could his feet, in the scenes where it was first nurtured. It went forth over the earth, crossing mountains and seas, overleaping the barriers of race and tongue, and finding a resting-place and home in every land. Nothing, indeed, is more significant in Longfellow's verse, than the ease and power with

which it has spoken to the people of every language, and of every condition in life.

Dr. Edwin A. Grosvenor, who was for some years connected with the American legation at Constantinople, tells of an eminent Turkish Pasha, who was, in some respects, he says, the most remarkable statesman among the Ottomans of the nineteenth century. He was a man of inflexible honesty, and naturally incurred the hostility of the privileged classes. Nevertheless he served with distinction as Ottoman ambassador to Persia, to France, and to Russia, and was twice honored with the dignity of Grand Vizier.

Better than any residence of state, says Dr. Grosvenor, he loved the gray stone building in his garden, in which he had collected the largest private library in the Turkish empire. It contained books from all over the world, and there were few among them which their owner could not read. One day Dr. Grosvenor was walking with him through the library, and he was pointing out the special treasures it contained, and speaking of them with the enthusiasm which is characteristic of a book-lover, when, taking a volume from one of the shelves, he said, "Do you know there is no book here which I care for more than this." It was a large volume, showing inside and out every sign of frequent use. Many lines in it were underscored, and in the margins were written frequent comments in quaint Turkish characters. "Some of these pieces," he said, "I know by heart." The book was a copy of Longfellow, and his were the poems that soothed the busy Mussulman

statesman in many a weary hour of his anxious and burdened life.

But that picture is not more interesting than the one, equally authenticated, of a poor lone woman dwelling in a hut that stood in a bare tract of the far northwestern frontier. "She had cut from an illustrated paper a picture of a young girl with Longfellow's poem *Maidenhood* printed below it, and had pasted it on her wall. There, day by day, as she stood at her bread-making or her washing, she gazed at the young face, and pondered the words of the poet, until both face and poem worked themselves into her nature. A visitor who chanced to call at her cabin one day, and to whom she talked of her precious poem, was astonished at the truths she had drawn from it, and declared that he went away with new and deeper views of the meaning and beauty of life."

These two pictures, of the accomplished Ottoman statesman in his richly-furnished library, and of the humble frontier woman with her one poem pasted on the wall, illustrate the range of the appeal that Longfellow makes to people in every condition of life, and in every land where literature is known and loved.

The explanation of this universal and unique appeal is to be found, partly, in the essential nature of his art. The truest art is that which reflects, in its motives and methods, the simplicity of Nature, and lays upon the human spirit a spell not unlike that which is wrought, in a thousand familiar ways, by Nature herself.

“The sunshine is a glorious birth” not only to Wordsworth, but, consciously or unconsciously, to men the world over. The dull monotone of the sea, and the rippling song of the brook, are soothing sounds to the ear, but he who hears them finds that, in some mysterious way, they are forthwith changed to dreams and fancies in his soul. The plaintive or cheerful note of a lone bird in the still depths of the forest, stirs in the listener a half-conscious sympathy for what seems like a remote and unshared ecstasy of joy or sorrow. The little flower that peeps timidly forth amid the withered and tangled *debris* of a waste place, brings a sudden light into the eye that sees it, and starts thoughts that are, perhaps, “too deep for tears.”

It is by such means as these, simple, familiar, unobtrusive, that nature often appeals to what is deepest within us, and lays a wondrous spell upon the imagination and the heart. And the art which appeals most widely and strongly to men, shares, or at least reflects this simplicity of Nature. Such is preëminently the character of Longfellow's art. It is simple, lucid, and human, both in its expression, and in the themes with which it deals. It has other notable characteristics also, like sincerity, flexibility, delicacy, and tact; but in its simplicity probably lies the special reason why its appeal is, in some measure, universal, like the appeal of Nature.

Closely connected with this characteristic of his art, and equally interesting, is the fact that the poet speaks primarily and directly to the human heart,

which is the same everywhere,—with the same hopes, and fears, and aspirations,—the same burdens, and griefs, and gropings for light,—the same loves, and longings, and regrets.

For the most part,—whether in psalm, or legend, or history, or song,—he wrote of the things that touch the hearts of men, and women, and little children;—and he made them new and surprising by his art,—by beauty of thought, tenderness of feeling, and delicacy of form.

“It may be glorious,” says Lowell, thinking and speaking of Robert Burns,—

“It may be glorious to write
Thoughts that shall glad the two or three
High souls, like those far stars that come in sight
Once in a century :—

“But better far it is to speak
One simple word, which now and then
Shall waken their free nature in the weak
And friendless sons of men.”

Now the poetry of Longfellow, like that of Burns, avails not only to waken their free nature in the weak and friendless sons of men, but also to glad the two or three high souls. Only we must not understand, by the two or three high souls, those who, from taste, or caprice, or fashion, are attracted chiefly by the bizarre, the passionate, the speculative, or the obscure, in verse, and find therein their standards and their ideals. The high souls, rather, are those who are catholic enough in their tastes to rejoice equally in

the ardor of the sun, and the gentleness of the moon ; in the roar of the cataract, and the ripple of the brook ; in the fragrance of the May flower, and the splendor of the June rose. They are those who are sincere enough to recognize not only the wisdom of the head, but the wisdom of the heart as well ; to perceive the touch of art in the wayside shrine as well as in the Parthenon ; to discern and honor Truth as surely in the humble garb of a pilgrim, as in the gorgeous robes of a priest. These are the veritable high souls of earth, and to these Longfellow speaks, as he speaks to the multitudes of undistinguished men and women.

It is easy to see now, though it might not have been foreseen, that the wide and rapturous response that followed the appearance of many of his poems, was likely to endanger their later repute. From the time of Aristides, men have been inclined to resent a too general repetition of an honorable title like "the Just," even when rightly bestowed. One or two of Longfellow's early pieces of didactic sentiment were so eagerly appropriated by the public, and have been so persistently quoted, and recited, and sung, that, to many, they have lost their first charm ; like a coin that by frequent handling has grown smooth, and retains only faint traces of the mint-mark which certified its value, and the sovereignty by which it was issued. It is interesting, therefore, to find so competent and exacting a judge as Mr. Churton Collins, declaring in a recent review, that "the *Psalm of Life* is a noble poem ; and all the mouthings of it in Infant Schools, and Christian

Associations, and all the strummings of middle-class pianos, will never make it other than noble." It is true that the *Psalm of Life* does not need this testimony to its nobility, but the testimony is, nevertheless, significant as a sober and vigorous protest against the captious and impatient criticism by which the poem is frequently disparaged.

Mr. Collins makes, also, the interesting and suggestive remark that "such poetry as Longfellow's is no more intended for critics than the Bible was intended for theologians, or the spring that gushes forth and refreshes the toil-worn traveler was intended to supply material for analytical chemistry."

It is not necessary to give unqualified assent to this picturesque dictum in all its details. To do that might involve one in serious differences with the theologians, at least, and perhaps with the chemists. But it may safely be said, by way of commentary and application, that whether the Bible is intended for theologians or not, it is likely to survive their controversies about it, just as the refreshing spring may confidently abide the tests of the analytical chemists. And there is as little doubt that Longfellow will continue to be read, and revered, and loved, whatever questions may be raised by unsympathetic or unfriendly critics concerning the qualities or the methods of his art.

The complaint is sometimes made, not alone of Longfellow, but of other poets as well, that the sentiment of which their poetry is the expression, is familiar and common, and that being so native to the human heart, and so homespun in its quality, the

verse in which it is enshrined is, so far, of an inferior order. The criticism is, of course, shallow, and not the less shallow because it often assumes a lofty tone. That which is pronounced a defect in the poetry is, in fact, what insures its permanent hold upon men. The sentiment which is new, or strange, or paradoxical, — sentiment which is peculiarly proper to prose, — may, in poetry also, stir a feeling of curiosity and interest; but the feeling is transient. It is like the guest of an hour, whose coming, indeed, is welcome, but whose visit is of brief significance, and is soon forgotten. But the sentiment which is familiar, because it is the spontaneous flowering of our nature, is perennial and abiding; and is like the friend whose accustomed place is by the intimate hearth-fire, and whose absence makes a void that cannot be filled.

Poetry which is the product of ingenious conceits, and subtle speculations, and morbid fancies, may have a temporary vogue, and make a special appeal to individuals; but the poetry which clings to the memory, and comforts, and refreshes, and purifies the heart, is that which deals sincerely and nobly with the primal feelings of love, and duty, and sorrow, and the home affections, and the sweetness of childhood, and the serenity of age, and the reverent fearlessness of death. The one kind of poetry is the curious, and often beautiful, fabric wrought by the human intellect, the other is the human reflection, more or less imperfect, of the divine wisdom which has made us what we are.

A human invention, like the telephone for example, at its first appearance startles and amazes us by what

seems like the exhibition of a power hitherto unrevealed. In a brief time it becomes merely the medium of ordinary business or of friendly intercourse, and takes an unobtrusive place among the lower things that minister to our convenience. It ceases to be even a marvel to us. But the lightning, that has played along the horizon or flashed from the clouds for unnumbered centuries, always the same, continues to waken within us emotions of wonder and awe. The appreciation of Longfellow, like the appreciation of all true poetry, demands of us an attitude of sympathy and reverence for the things which, because they are not of human origin, are ever-repeated, and fundamental, and commonplace.

Longfellow was a poet of the fireside, but he was also, and scarcely less, a poet of the sea. In his boyhood, his imagination was charmed by the "beauty and mystery of the ships," in his seaport home. In his college days, he was a frequent and interested visitor to the neighboring ship-building yard on Maquoit Bay, and followed eagerly the several stages in the construction of a ship, from the laying of the keel to the stepping of the masts. In his manhood, he wrote, with keen delight, the beautiful seaside idyl, *The Building of the Ship*, in which the art of the poet gave a fine touch of sentiment and romance to the age-long art of the ship-builder; and closed the idyl with the fervid patriotic outburst which drew tears from the patient eyes of our Great-heart Lincoln, and from his lips the exclamation, "It is a wonderful gift to be able to stir men like that!"

"I prefer the seaside to the country," he once

remarked; "the idea of liberty is much stronger there." He turned his eyes away from the meadows and the mountains, and fastened his thoughts upon "the magic of the sea." As he gazed off upon the deep, his fancy was lured and captivated by its mystery and never-failing fascination. The islands and forts of Casco Bay, the fog-bells and beacons, the alternation of mist and sunshine, the subdued cadence and the hoarse cry of the waves, the dancing boats of the fishermen and the stately canvas of coastwise vessels, — all these things gave impulse and charm to his imagination. And so he wrote of *The Beacon*, of *The Lighthouse*, of *The Phantom Ship*, of *Sea-weed*, of *The Wreck of the Hesperus*, of *The Reef of Norman's Woe*, and of many a scene that brings us a transient whiff of the ocean breath. Figures and metaphors drawn from the sea are everywhere in his poetry, from the "forlorn and shipwrecked brother sailing o'er life's stormy main", to the beautiful little sermon spoken by the clergyman to the bride and groom as they stand on the happy deck of the newly-built ship, — a sermon as fit for us as it was for them : —

"Like unto ships far off at sea,
Outward or homeward bound are we;
Before, behind, and all around,
Floats and swings the horizon's bound;
Seems at its distant rim to rise
And climb the crystal wall of the skies,
And then again to turn and sink,
As if we could slide from its outer brink.
Ah! it is not the sea,

It is not the sea that sinks and shelves,
But ourselves
That rock and rise
With endless and uneasy motion,
Now touching the very skies,
Now sinking into the depths of ocean.
Ah! if our souls but poise and swing,
Like the compass in its brazen ring,
Ever level, and ever true
To the toil and the task we have to do,
We shall sail securely, and safely reach
The Fortunate Isles on whose shining beach
The sights we see and the sounds we hear,
Will be those of joy, and not of fear."

The 'divine' Sir Philip Sidney, as his contemporaries, not without reason delighted to call him, remarks in his *Apologie for Poetrie*, that of all sciences the Poet is monarch. "He cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion; * * and with a tale, forsooth, he cometh to you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner; and pretending nothing more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue."

Of that ideal of a poet which is as old as the art itself, Longfellow is an admirable exemplification. He comes to us with a tale which, by its vivid and picturesque charm holds children from play, and old men from the chimney corner. He unites the art of a story-teller to the art of a poet. The narrative may be an avowed tale, like those which were told with Chaucerian grace in the *Wayside Inn*, or it may be

in the form of an idyl, a ballad, or an epic ; but it is always well-ordered, graceful in style, lucid in language, and happy in the adaptation of the metre to the theme. There is scarcely any variety of English verse which he has not employed, and an unerring instinct led him to choose the form that is fitted to his subject. For the tale of *Evangeline*, an idyl of wondrous beauty, and tenderness, and pathos, and for *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, that picture of stern Puritanic life, relieved by a delicate and engaging charm of humor, he made the bold and deliberate choice of the hexameter form of verse. Forthwith the critics, or some of them, began busily to demonstrate that the metre was, of necessity, harsh, halting, and unsuited to English verse ; that the attempt to adapt a classical metre, however musical in its origin, to the peculiarities of English speech, had always been a failure, and must continue to be a failure. They talked learnedly of the incompatibility of “quantity” and “accent.” They filled their pages, and vexed the air, with their remarks about “trochees,” and “dactyls,” and “anapests,” and the laws of ancient and modern prosody. So insistent were they, and so confident of the truth and importance of their contention, that one might well have been disposed to adopt the impatient utterance of Burns to his critics, —

“What’s a’ your jargon of your schools?
Your Latin names for horns and stools?
If honest Nature made you fools
What sairs your grammars?”

For, strange as it might seem, while they were busily engaged in proving that the metre which Longfellow had adopted could not be pleasant to the ear, or inviting to the reader, the gentle idyl, with its sweetness, and sincerity, and grace, was winning its way to all hearts, and charming all ears; so that the reader or hearer of it was tempted at its conclusion to apply to the poem itself the description of its heroine: —

“Homeward serenely she walked, with God’s benediction
upon her;
When she had passed it seemed like the ceasing of exquisite
music.”

Another experiment in metrical form was made by Longfellow in the poem of *Hiawatha*. It may fairly be called a kind of epic, for, while strikingly unique in form, it is scarcely more unlike the classical type of epic than is the *Faery Queen* of Spenser, or Tennyson’s *Idyls of the King*. It relates the primeval traditions, and describes the daily life, of a shy, mysterious people, of whom the little that we know invests them with a strange romantic interest. Under the poet’s spell, we sit by them at the door of the lodge, and go with them to hunt in the forest; we shoot the rapids with them in a birch canoe that floats on the river,

“Like a yellow leaf in Autumn,
Like a yellow water lily.”

We are charmed observers of their wooing, and guests at their wedding feast. We seem to partake

in their blithe fellowship with bird and beast, and to share in their stoical suffering and grief. We listen to their simple and stately talk, and become familiar with their superstitions, and feel the charm of their childlike faith. It is a strange world of primitive manners and speech, in which the human life is in closest contact with the life of Nature. The Indians of the present day, bewildered by the conditions and contaminated by the vices of modern civilization, do not seem inviting subjects for poetic treatment, and it was by a supreme effort of sympathetic imagination that Longfellow was able to revivify their primitive state, and to shed upon it an ideal glow in which it will henceforth exist. The poem which does this has no prototype, and will have no successor. The metre in which it is written is a most skilful adaptation of form to subject and purpose. It was borrowed from an ancient Finnish poem, and Longfellow's unfailing artistic sense perceived the fitness of it for his purpose. He had to tell of the doings of a rude folk, living in the forests, sharing some of the traits, as they shared the companionship of the wild animal life about them, having a limited stock of words and ideas, and with the superstitions natural to their savage state. What could be better suited to this difficult purpose than the short, rapid, trochaic lines, full of parallelisms and repetitions, the model of which he found in the old Finnish poem, and adopted with an added grace of his own?

“Ye who love a nation's legends,
Love the ballads of a people,

That like voices from afar off
Call to us to pause and listen ; —
Ye whose hearts are fresh and simple,
Who have faith in God and nature,
Who believe that in all ages
Every human heart is human,
That in even savage bosoms
There are longings, yearnings, strivings,
For the good they comprehend not,
That the feeble hands and helpless,
Groping blindly in the darkness,
Touch God's right hand in the darkness,
And are lifted up and strengthened ; —
Listen to this simple story,
To this song of Hiawatha."

So winning and graceful an invitation could scarcely be resisted ; and the people did listen, and were glad. And they identified the poet with the sweet Indian singer, Chibiabos ; and when Longfellow was borne to his burial his own words were the fitting requiem : —

"He is dead, the sweet musician !
He is gone from us forever !
He has moved a little nearer
To the Master of all music,
To the Master of all singing !"

It is a great change to pass from the poem of *Hiawatha*, which remains absolutely unique in the world of Art, to a form of verse so familiar as the Sonnet, which has been cultivated by all the great English poets since Wyatt and Surrey wrote in the

middle of the sixteenth century. The passage, however, from the one form of verse to the other was not difficult to the flexible genius of Longfellow. Of his sonnets too much can scarcely be said in praise. By virtue of them if we should take no account of his other work, he belongs among the most esteemed of modern poets. The sonnet is a most exacting form of verse. To achieve excellence in it demands a rich poetic imagination, transparent clearness, self restraint, a delicate ear for musical cadence, mastery of the resources of rhyme, and a sure vision of the single thought to be conveyed. It is almost a supreme test of imaginative and artistic genius. Many poets who have written well in other forms of verse have failed in this. In the hands of a master it has compelling beauty and power; but it is often dull and uninviting. Longfellow was preëminently an artist in the temper and structure of his verse, and his sonnets are among the noblest that were produced in the last century. If one were to begin to name them he could not fail to make a catalogue too long to be read, certainly at this time.

Some of them are revelations of his insight, and speak his reverent appreciation of the great masters of poetry, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton. Some of them are brimmed with tenderness and love for the memory of dear and vanished friends. Some of them throw the brilliant light of his fancy, or the steady radiance of his faith, on the joys of life and the mystery of death. One of them is of special interest and charm to us, because it is a loving tribute to a revered teacher of his college days, Parker Cleaveland.

Not a few of these sonnets it would be a pleasure to read to this audience, but I content myself with one, which in perfection of form and nobility of sentiment is unsurpassed. It was written in his seventieth year, when his thoughts turned, not unnaturally, to the solemn event which he began to anticipate, but did not fear :

“As one who long hath fled with panting breath
Before his foe, bleeding and near to fall,
I turn and set my back against the wall,
And look thee in the face, triumphant Death.
I call for aid, and no one answereth ;
I am alone with thee, who conquerest all ;
Yet me thy threatening form doth not appall,
For thou art but a phantom and a wraith.
Wounded and weak, sword broken at the hilt,
With armor shattered, and without a shield,
I stand unmoved ; do with me what thou wilt ;
I can resist no more, but will not yield.
This is no tournament where cowards tilt ;
The vanquished here is victor of the field.”

A strange pathetic thing in the closing years of Emerson's life was the failure of his memory to recall the words which he wanted. He had been, through his life, a master of words. They seemed to wait upon him, — rich, pregnant, vivid words, — ready to his call, like alert and obsequious servants, eager and able, like Prospero's Ariel,

“To tread the ooze of the salt deep,
To run upon the sharp wind of the north,
To do him business in the veins o' the earth
When it is baked with frost.”

No homely lesson, no poetic imagining, no etherial vision, but it came from him in words that carried their humble or their mystic message deftly and clearly into the minds of men. But the power failed him. His richly-liveried retinue of slaves no longer responded to his need. He groped pitifully, in vain, for words and names which had always seemed to anticipate his summons.

In those days of pathetic failure, a short time before his own death, he was present at the funeral service of his friend Longfellow. During the service he rose, and going to the side of the coffin, looked intently upon the face of the dead poet. A few moments later he rose again, and looked once more upon the familiar features. Then he said to a friend near him, "That gentleman was a sweet, beautiful soul, but I have entirely forgotten his name."

It was an interesting and instructive incident. The name of his cherished friend might be lost in the mist that had gathered about his memory, but nothing could blot from his consciousness the significant fact that the still face into which he looked was the face of a serene and beautiful spirit.

It is not permitted us to look upon the living or the dead features of the poet, except as they are chiseled or drawn for us in bust or portrait; but we may look again and again, as often as we will into the poems which bear the impress of his spirit, and if words fail us to describe the secret of their charm, we shall still feel, with Emerson, that he who wrote them was a "sweet, beautiful soul."

POEM

BY

REV. SAMUEL VALENTINE COLE, D.D.,

CLASS OF 1874

A POET'S CENTENARY

I

WE were a busy people ; axes rang,
And anvils ; when amid the day's turmoil
A melody crept ; a master came, and sang,
And charmed the workers, sweetening all the toil
As Orpheus did, who once, with flute to lip,
Helped mightily at the launching of the ship.

And in and out among us many a day
He went, this singer, with his happy strain ;
Greeted the little children at their play ;
Was present at the hanging of the crane ;
Blessed maidenhood and manhood ; blessed the birds ; —
His life beat like the sunshine through his words.

At last he said upon occasion high,
The light of seventy summers in his face,
“O, Cæsar, we who are about to die
Salute you,” and he said it from this place,
With aged comrades round him who should all
So soon restore life's armor to the wall.

Those men have passed into the Silent Land,
Their earthly battles ended ; many a change
Has crept on us beneath time's moulding hand,
And on these scenes with faces new and strange ;
But not on him : the magic of his art
Still penetrates the citadel of the heart !

And where he once has entered to delight
And cheer and strengthen, linger he must and will;
Oft mingling with the voices of the night
Some fragment of his song to haunt us still,
Or lure to far-off realms, and unawares
Scatter in flight an Arab host of cares.

A hundred years — how old he would have been !
And yet how young ; for, as we turn his page,
We mark the throbbings of a life within
Old as the world and new to every age.
Beauty and love and sorrow — from such themes
Uprose the golden fabric of his dreams.

II

“God sent his singers upon earth,” he said ;
What were the earth without them ? what were life
We call so glorious but games and bread,
Sordid existence or ignoble strife,
Were there no voices crying to the soul,
Nor any vision of life’s path and goal ?

The truth we need and wait for may at times
Break suddenly on us like a cannon’s roar,
But oftener comes in faintest elfin chimes
Blown o’er the border line from some dim shore,
Or, yet, as blind and helpless as we are,
It comes in perfect stillness like a star.

Ay, even invisible as the air that rolls,
Stand great unproven truths which, as we must,
We build our lives upon, and stake our souls,
Outweighing knowledge with our hope and trust, —

Truths which keen Science, labor as she may,
Can never explain — and never explain away !

Science may guide o'er many a hill and plain,
Revealing how the pathways meet and part;
But for life's pathless and uncharted main,
Whereon our surest pilot is the heart,
We need their vision unto whom belong
The mystery and the mastery of song !

"Listen ! behold ! believe !" are tones that fill
The poets' signs and symbols manifold, —
Those fables of the ever-singing Hill,
Isles of the Blest, cities with streets of gold,
Enchanted castles, youth-restoring streams,
And all the El Doradoes of our dreams !

For song, indeed, is truth full-winged with power ;
A faithful voice that calls us from afar ;
An impulse from some land where every hour
God's truth reigns sovereign ; some hope-bringing star ;
Some sword that stirs the spirit, as were stirred
The Prophets and Apostles of the Word !

The poets go before us ; they discern,
Across these spaces of life's gloom and glow,
The great ideals that ever live and burn ;
They break all pathways without fear, and, lo,
They travel onward, keeping still in sight
Some pillar of cloud by day, of fire by night.

The blessed poets save us — not the kings,
And not the warriors ; no great human wrongs
Have they e'er stood for ; no great rightful things
But they have loved and cherished ; by their songs

We march and prosper ; by their torches' rays
The world moves forward into nobler ways.

And in their hands for gracious use they bear
The crowning gift of immortality ;
The songless cities perish ; in thin air
Empires dissolve ; old customs cease to be ;
But aught that is, though flung by others by,
The poets touch it and it cannot die !

Still Homer's heroes live and talk and fight ;
The old men chirp of Helen ; beacons flare
From Ilium on to Argos in the night ;
Penelope does not of her lord despair,
But ravel's still the day's work with her hands ;
And still Nausicaa by the pillar stands.

How marvelous time's world-structure named of Song,
With masonry of dream-stuff, and with halls
Of golden music ! yet secure and strong ;
Whereon decay's dark shadow never falls ;
A miracle of the masters from all lands
And from all times — this house not made with hands !

III

Ah ! silently there sweeps before my eyes
A vision of three poets dear to all
Who feel the touch of beauty, and who prize
The nobler voices that around us fall ;
Each from a different land, but all the three
Facing the morning of a world to be.

Lo, Roman Virgil! at whose wizard name
Things lost their power to change and pass away;
Troy burns and does not vanish in the flame;
A great queen greets the exiles; still to-day
Men hear, as by the Tiber's side they stroll,
The funeral hymn of young Marcellus roll.

Lo, also, England's Virgil! Arthur reigns
Forever in the halls of Camelot;
Fair women sacrifice for noble gains
Who never will grow old or be forgot;
And those three Queens that helped are helping still
The men who help to banish human ill.

And, pray, why lingers Hiawatha so?
Why must Priscilla and John Alden stand
Telling the old, old tale and never go?
Wherefore this many a year throughout the land
Keeps sad Evangeline her unwearied quest?
The answer is — our Virgil of the West!

Three Laureates of three great peoples! Each,
In golden phrase and music-laden words,
Moulded to sweetest use his country's speech;
Loved simple things, touched ever the common chords,
Winning the people's heart, and lived to hear
The praises of the world sound in his ear.

The realm of books each ever loved to roam,
Finding new glories for the song he wove;
Sang childhood, the affections of the home,
And the dear constancy of woman's love;
Found tears in human things, and evermore
Stretched yearning hands out toward the farther shore.

They sang that men should faint not, but endure,
Follow the gleam, and wear the fadeless flower
Of hope forever; that the goal is sure
For those who strive and trust the Heavenly Power.
They lived pure lives and gentle, nor through all
Uttered a word they ever need recall.

So like in their unlikeness, that I dare
(As else I dare not) name them side by side;
Swayed by one mood and spirit; as they fare,
The spaces close between them, else so wide;
While their immortal echoes strike across
All tumults hitherward, nor suffer loss.

IV

Bowdoin, dear Mother, to thy listening ear
His step falls on these pathways as of yore;
Again the "boy's will is the wind's will" here,
And his the "long, long thoughts" of youth once more;
For thine he was when first the vision came
To him of the alluring face of fame.

He caught the pathos from thy murmuring pines,
The melody from thy river, beauty and light
From the fair sky above thee where the signs,
Thick with white worlds, roll solemnly by night;
Thy son, and master in the art divine,
All this he wrought into his lustrous line.

But chiefly — for he knew what springs had fed
His youthful spirit in its purpose high —
Did he remember — on the day he said
That he was old and was about to die —
With gracious words of tenderness and truth,
The faces of the teachers of his youth.

Thrice happy are such teachers, with the dower
Of knowledge and of counsel in their hand !
They sit forever at the springs of power,
And from these quiet places of the land,
No trumpet blowing and no flag unfurled,
They shape the forces that will shape the world.

Ah ! as once more we walk these shades among,
What visions from the bygone years arise !
The faces, O, the faces, how they throng,
And pass, and come again, with friendly eyes,
And fill for each of us, with life more vast,
That other present which we call the past !

And he is of them ! Lo, the hearts that brim
With hope and courage, and do not grow old,
Have somewhere, somehow, learned to love like him
The nobler things that are not bought and sold,
Remembering the light that through life's bars
Breaks from beyond the sunset and the stars !

